

Who Would Not Fear? (Revelation 15:1-16:1)
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Last week we learned about the fear of God from the story of Abraham in the Old Testament. Today, we will examine the message of martyred saints in Revelation 15. These saints ask who wouldn't fear God. At worst, men can destroy our bodies, but God can destroy our bodies and souls. He is the One who should be feared and obeyed. True power and true glory are God's alone. Those who know the truth about God should readily bow before Him.

Revelation 15 is the set up for chapter 16, which describes the seven bowls of God's wrath. Chapter 15 is the preparatory ceremony, during which the first event is the choir singing God's praises. The choir is comprised of martyrs, who having been murdered by the beast now stand victorious in heaven, just as Jesus was victorious in death by the power of God the Father. They sing the song Moses, from Exodus 15, which celebrates God's deliverance of Israel through the destruction of the Egyptian army. They also sing the song of the Lamb to celebrate the upcoming destruction of the enemies of the saints of God. They sing of God's glory, and how every nation must bow before Him, for His righteous act of judgment has been revealed. God's justice is good. There is no need to apologize for this righteous act.

After the song, the doors of the temple open, and the angels process with their special garments to receive their special task. One of the living creatures (from chapter 4) presents to each angel a bowl of God's wrath. Nobody enters the temple or moves inside. All are focused on the solemnity of the moment as the smoke of God's glory and power fills the temple. This is real glory, not the phony glory we see in modern ceremonies such as inaugurations and coronations today. Before the throne of God everyone is in awe.

The ceremony is about God's judgment. This judgment assigned to these angels was foretold long ago, and the long awaited day has finally come. The martyred saints cry out from under the altar (6:9) for their blood to be avenged. Punishing wickedness is a good thing because true justice is good. This isn't the broken corrupt system of justice we know today. God's justice is completely fair. In order for God to bring about a perfect world, evil must be punished and the innocent must be avenged. Justice must be served, and righteousness must defeat wickedness. God's perfect justice must be satisfied. This can only happen two ways. Either we accept Jesus and let justice be satisfied through His sacrifice, or we reject Jesus and let God's wrath be poured out on us. The gospel is a message of grace, but those who reject God's grace and mercy are

calling for judgment on themselves. Many are uncomfortable with the imagery of the destruction of the wicked, but God isn't embarrassed by it. His judgment is pure and right. When we see bloodshed today, it's mostly due to injustice in the world. But God's destruction is just.

Revelation 16:6 makes it clear that this judgment is well deserved. We need to know and think about His judgment. It's not pleasant, but it is good. How could the next world be perfect if the crimes of the wicked were never judged, if the blood of the saints weren't avenged, and if evil weren't destroyed? If God didn't punish them, He would be complicit in the murder of the saints.

The four bowls mirror the four trumpets (having to do with the earth, the sea, the fresh water, and the heavenly bodies). The last three are darkness, the drying up of rivers, and earthquakes and hail. In 16:16, the kings gather together for a war council to conspire against God. Later in chapter 19 we will see the armies of the beast have no chance against God.

There are three things we should notice about God's judgment. First, the judgment is focused on the beast, the tyrannical usurper of the earth, and those who follow him. Second, the punishment is designed to elicit repentance. God punishes them, then gives them a chance to repent. But every time they refuse to repent or even blaspheme God, and then the next round of punishment comes. They defy Him to the bitter end. This is pure and raw evil. Third, this judgment is righteous and just. They fully deserved it. This justice isn't for us to carry out, but for God alone. God is the supreme sovereign. Fearing God is the mandate of man.

Remember that Revelation is addressed to seven churches, and also to churches today. It is an encouragement and a warning against straying from God. We must persevere despite what men may do to us. But if we turn away, God's justice will fall on us. We better make sure we are on His side. Revelation is about Jesus coming back to set things right. It is also about the antichrist, the ultimate manifestation of man's rebellion against God. But he is no match for Jesus. God isn't just telling us about the future, but about Himself. He is in control, and everyone should fear Him. How wicked are those who don't. God is the ruler of all, greater than all else.